

## **Outreach to Homeless Veterans in Jail**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have shown that outreach to incarcerated veterans leads many to use VA mental health and medical services in the year following their release. As part of an outreach effort to increase health care utilization among homeless veterans, over 8,000 homeless veterans were contacted by outreach workers in the Los Angeles area between 1997-1999. One fifth of those were in jail at the time of contact. Homelessness and legal problems often go together. Release from prison or jail poses big challenges for community re-entry since criminal records are stigmatizing for employers and landlords as well as among friends and families of offenders. This transition period may be an ideal time for outreach efforts because of the great need and an enforced period of sobriety from abused substances. In this study, outreach contacts and referrals were provided to both jailed and community homeless veterans. The jailed veterans reported many medical and social problems as 83% has been unemployed for 3 years, one third were diagnosed with serious mental illness, one half reported problems with drug or alcohol use and one third had a current serious medical problem. Following the outreach intervention, 38% used some VA medical services but this service use was less than half of the 84% rate of service use by non-jailed homeless veterans contacted in the community. In the jailed group, 80% were eligible to receive VA services and this study showed that providing outreach services in jail settings reaches around half of this eligible group. Prison outreach appears to be a viable method for linking homeless veterans to needed services. The research group included MIRECC researcher Robert Rosenheck and VA Northeast Program Evaluation Center researchers James McGuire and Wesley Kaspro.